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THE WALT WHITMAN CULT IN GERMANY

In one of his conversations with his friend Traubel,¹ in the year 1888, Whitman is said to have made the following characteristic remark: "I have always wished to know what a real live German — a German born and bred — would make of me." A unique interest attaches to this remark from the fact that it is only within recent years that Whitman's works have received a 'hearing' in Germany, despite the enviable reputation which the poet enjoyed in other foreign countries even long before his death.

In England, William Rossetti and Robert Buchanan had espoused his cause as early as 1868; the former, in his introduction to the first English edition of the *Leaves of Grass*, the latter, in a separate essay. Only a comparatively short time after this, some of the foremost literary men of the country — Stevenson, Tennyson, Swinburne, Morris, Dowden, Symonds, Clifford — had become his most enthusiastic friends and admirers.² Though less well known in France than in England, Whitman has nevertheless exerted an appreciable influence on modern French men of letters ever since they made their first acquaintance with him, in 1872, through an article published by Madame Blanc in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.³

But his reputation abroad was not long to remain confined to these two countries. Even before the end of the seventies, his poetry had been favored with a friendly reception in several other countries of Europe, notably Russia, Italy, and Scandinavia. From then on through the eighties and nineties, European interest in the poet continued to spread with increasing intensity until certain sections of the Continent seemed to be swept by a veritable tidal wave of Whitman enthusiasm which has by no means wholly subsided even at the present time. Naturally

¹ Cf. *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, by Horace Traubel. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1908. p. 389.

² Cf. *Atlantic Monthly*, XCII (November, 1903), p. 714 ff., and *Methodist Review* for November 1897, p. 952 ff.

³ Cf. *Current Literature*, XLV. No. 3 (September, 1908), p. 286 ff.

enough, its causes, its effects, as well as other circumstances connected with it, have differed with the different countries.

What particular relation, then, does Germany sustain to this wide-spread Whitman agitation or Whitman cult abroad? Chronologically, her position is very similar to that of England, for it was in the year 1868 that Ferdinand Freiligrath first called the attention of the German public to the name of Whitman, hence the very year in which English readers made their first acquaintance with his *Leaves of Grass*. In fact, Freiligrath's own knowledge of the poet doubtless had its source in Rossetti's introduction to the first English edition of this collection of poems.

Freiligrath's announcement of the poet and his work appeared in the form of an essay⁴ accompanied by specimen translations from the *Drum Taps*. Owing to the very important rôle which this, the first German reference to Whitman, has played in subsequent references, a somewhat full abstract of its contents might properly find a place here.

As if he were anticipating an outburst of general surprise and a skeptical shrugging of shoulders among his countrymen at the announcement of a 'real' American poet, the German enthusiast sounds his note as loudly and directly as possible: "Walt Whitman! Who is Walt Whitman? The answer is: a poet! A new American poet! His admirers say: the first, the only specifically American poet that his country has produced up to the present time. Not one who treads the beaten paths of the European muse, but one who steps upon the scene fresh from the prairies and pioneer settlements; fresh from the coast and the mighty rivers; fresh from the seething crowds of men at the harbors; fresh from the battlefields of the South,—his hair, beard and clothing suffused, as it were, with a scent of the very soil from which he has sprung: a totally unique figure, one who stands firmly and consciously on his own American feet. Nay, say his admirers, Walt Whitman is in reality the only poet in

⁴To be found in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* for April 24, 1868. The essay is also taken up in Vol. 4 of Freiligrath's *Gesammelte Dichtungen*. Stuttgart. 1876.

whom the present age, our struggling, inquiring age, has found adequate expression; the poet *par excellence*; the poet."

To the question as to what the essence of Whitman's poetry really is, Freiligrath replies: "In the first place, Walt Whitman himself, his ego. But this ego is a part of America, a part of the earth, of humanity, of the universe. Such he feels himself to be, and, attaching equal importance to things trivial and things sublime, he unfurls before our gaze a magnificent world-panorama, always beginning with, and always returning to, America. Whitman and his Americanism are dominated by what might be called a cosmic impulse, as we find it in meditative minds who have spent days of solitude on the beach, nights of solitude under the starry heavens of the prairies—face to face with immortality. . . . Whatever he sees or hears or touches, whatever comes into his presence, though it be the lowliest, the most trivial and commonplace—it is all regarded by him as a symbol of something higher, something spiritual. Or rather, matter and spirit, the real and the ideal are to him one and the same thing. And thus he stands forth as an emanation of himself; thus he moves along chanting his songs; thus, as a proud, free being, and only a human being, he reveals to us social and political perspectives broad as the world itself."

With reference to Whitman's rejection of conventional forms of poetry, Freiligrath continues: "He deserves indeed to be observed more closely by our poets and philosophers as a strange new associate of theirs who threatens to overthrow our whole *ars poetica*, all our æsthetic canons and theories. . . . Have we then really come to the point where life, even in poetry, imperiously demands new modes of expression? Has our age so many important things to tell us that the old vessels no longer suffice for the contents? Is it true that we are standing before a new poetic era, just as a music-of-the future has been promised us now for some years? And is Walt Whitman more than Richard Wagner?"

These outbursts of enthusiasm failed of their purpose completely, they were received with a totally indifferent attitude on the part of the German public. In fact, it would seem almost as if the very ardor of Freiligrath's endorsement, instead of in-

spiring confidence, had had the opposite effect of arousing public suspicion, thus defeating its own end. However this may be, the real cause of the indifference displayed by the Germans is doubtless to be sought in the great disparity existing at the time between the fundamental spirit in Whitman's poetry and the leading ideals of German life.

In the first place, a people like the Germans, in whom the traditions of centuries had crystallized a into profound regard for the heroic and legendary past, could cherish no natural fondness for a poet who made it a part of his creed to spurn all things relating to the past and draw his themes from the every-day life of his own times. Moreover, their inborn conception of a dual relation as existing between the visible and the invisible world, between matter and spirit, was altogether incompatible with Whitman's pronounced doctrine of monism or cosmic identity. And lastly, the artistic finish of the productions of their own classic writers had fostered in them a sense for excellence of form, which would not easily accomodate itself to the utter formlessness of the *Leaves of Grass*; and hence Whitman and his poetry were destined to pass unnoticed for a long period of years.

Meanwhile, however, Germany was undergoing some of the most far-reaching transformations in the intellectual, political, and social life of its people. The introduction and popularization of Darwinian theories near the middle of the century resulted in a quickening interest in scientific research, which soon wrought a complete change in the attitude previously held toward the natural sciences, removing all existing prejudices against them and raising them to equal rank with the mental and moral sciences. In the second place, the unification of the German states after the close of the Franco-Prussian war was followed by an era of industrial development which had the effect of turning the attention of thinking men more and more away from questions of speculative thought to problems of actual life. Moreover, the popular movements for Liberalism and Nationalism previous to the year 1870 culminated during the last two quarters of the century in a lively agitation for National Socialism or Social Democracy. In short, Germany

was during this time passing through a series of most significant changes in all the important phases of its national life, and, as in the departments of science, industry, and social organizations, so also in the province of literature and art,—idealism was being superseded by realism. Accordingly, the poets of the rising generation were forced to renounce all allegiance to the fundamental views of classicism and romanticism, and turn to the treatment of themes dealing with the realities of contemporary life. Then followed the rise of the naturalistic movement.

It was at this juncture that Whitman was introduced to German readers for a second time, this time by T. W. Rolleston, the well-known English author of a *Life* of Lessing. Rolleston first published a German lecture on Whitman in 1883. The following year he translated parts of the *Leaves of Grass*, but in offering his work for publication, he “met with more serious difficulties than he had expected.”⁵ “The work is ready,” he says, “and could go to the printer any day. But the printer is not equally ready for the work. I offered it to four publishers before I left Germany, agreeing to pay all expenses myself, and all refused to take it up. . . . I am told there would probably be difficulties with the police, who in Germany exercise a most despotic power.” What further efforts Rolleston may have made at the time does not appear. At all events, difficulties of one kind or another must have continued for some three or four years at least, for the next mention of the proposed German edition seems to be the one by Whitman himself, in the year 1888, when he spoke of its “coming along splendidly.” Meanwhile, Rolleston had enlisted the interest and co-operation of Dr. Karl Knortz of this country, and it was under the joint editorship of these two men that the first German edition of the *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1889,—not in Germany, but in Zürich.⁶ The appearance of this edition marks the beginning of the German Whitman agitation.

⁵ Cf. his letter to Whitman in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, by Horace Traubel. Boston. 1906. p. 18 ff.

⁶ Published, under the title *Walt Whitman. Grashalme. In Auswahl übersetzt*, by the Verlags-Magazin (J. Schabelitz).

The double introduction⁷ to the Rolleston-Knortz collection betrays the greatest eagerness on the part of the translators to create a favorable impression. Whitman is here heralded, first of all, as the poet of the age, for no one else had succeeded as well as he in reconciling "the all-denying spirit of analysis with the all-affirming spirit of democracy." In a flattering reference to the supremacy of German thought in the nineteenth century, he is rated as "the greatest poetic representative of that which is usually considered a prime focal point in German philosophy." By means of cleverly drawn parallels between the American poet and some of Germany's favorite sons, for example, Beethoven and Uhland, one of the translators (Knortz) seeks to appeal to German national pride. And knowing that the people of one country are always glad to obtain renewed confirmation of their opinions regarding another, he makes it his special business to inform his German compatriots that the Americans have but one ideal in life, namely that of material gain: he then proceeds to show that Whitman had arisen to supply the very ideals which American society lacked. Truly, Rolleston and Knortz had done all that could be asked of them to stimulate German interest in the poet and his work,—and their labors were soon to prove fruitful of positive results, though somewhat slowly at first.

During the ten years immediately following the publication of the Rolleston-Knortz edition of the *Leaves of Grass*, no other German collection, either of Whitman's poetry or of his prose writings, appeared in print; nor does the number of essays on the poet himself seem to have been very large, the whole number noted amounting to only seven in all. However, the original collection of translations must have been favored with a fairly large circle of readers, for it was only ten years after its issue that a second edition of it was published by Knortz, under the title of *Walt Whitman: Der Dichter der Demokratie*.⁸ During the second decade of German Whitmanism (1899-1909), on the

⁷ A translation of this introduction is included in *In re Walt Whitman*. Philadelphia: D. McKay. 1893. Cf. also *Geschichte der Nordamerikanischen Literatur* von Karl Knortz. Berlin. 1891. Bd. II., pp. 1-24.

⁸ *Walt Whitman: Der Dichter der Demokratie*. Zweite Auflage. Leipzig: Fr. Fleischer. 1899.

other hand, there appeared in all, three separate German editions of the *Leaves of Grass*, three of Whitman's prose works, one translation of an English biography of the poet, and besides, some twenty-five or thirty German essays on Whitman, ranging in size and importance from an ordinary newspaper article to a study or monograph in book form.

Putting these figures together, we find that the twenty years which are bounded by the dates 1889-1909 have witnessed the appearance of no less than five German translations of Whitman's poetry, three of his prose writings, and one of his "Life," in addition to some thirty or forty German essays or monographs on the poet himself. These various translations and essays have been accompanied by a large number of reviews and shorter notices. Most of the references to Whitman are characterized by a supreme admiration which, in some instances, rises in intensity even to the point of fanaticism or deification. It is this extravagant admiration for the poet which justifies the use of the term cult as a name for the agitation as a whole.

The prevailing spirit of the German Whitman cult is illustrated best, perhaps, by the various metaphorical designations with which some of the most ardent admirers of the poet have attempted to epitomize their individual conceptions of him. Julius Rodenberg⁹ is content to call him "a most remarkable and unique phenomenon in the world's literature." Others have made use of more specific designations, a few of which are mentioned below. In the introduction to his *Poet of Democracy*, Knortz calls him "the optimist *par excellence*," to which Johannes Schlaf¹⁰ objects very emphatically, saying that he is neither optimist nor pessimist: "he is energy itself (*er ist Kraft*)."¹¹ In another place¹² Schlaf calls him "the first poet-seer of a third gospel, the first perfect man, the first free representative of the new monistic spirit, a perfect one-and-only-one." In substance, Karl Federn¹³ says the same: "he is, first of all, a prophet, and

⁹ In *Deutsche Rundschau* for 1899. pp. 501-506.

¹⁰ *Walt Whitman*. Verlag Kreisende Ringe. 1897.

¹¹ *Das Litterarische Echo* for 1899. pp. 65-66.

¹² In his *Essays zur Amerikanischen Litteratur*. Halle a.d.S. Otto Hendel. 1899. p. 94. Cf. also his *Walt Whitman. Grashalme. Eine Auswahl*. Minden. 1904.

his work is a gospel for our own age as well as for ages to come; he is a physically and psychically perfect man." Benzmann¹³ calls him "a superman in the sense that Nietzsche understands by that term." Speaking of his importance for America, Lentrödt¹⁴ calls him "an inexhaustible well." This figure Lessing¹⁵ enlarges upon as follows: "He is the center, summit, and fountain-head of a first great epoch in the intellectual life of the new world."

Equally significant are the parallels which some of the German Whitmanites have drawn between their hero and certain well-known historical personages. Karl Federn says that in the case of Goethe and Whitman alike "the man and his work are inseparably united." Lessing makes a similar comparison, as follows: "Whitman is the greatest poet since Goethe. . . . He is the embodiment, the representative, and the illuminator of American literature in the same sense that Dante is of the Italian, Shakespeare of the English, and Goethe of the German." Johannes Schlaf¹⁶ likens our poet to Nietzsche. "The more we read ourselves into Whitman," he says, "the greater is our surprise and astonishment to find between him and Friedrich Nietzsche a certain consanguinity of nature (*Wesensverwandtschaft*); in capacity for and fineness of feeling the one is in every sense the other's equal." The boldest parallel, however, is perhaps the one by Wilhelm Schölermann.¹⁷ After mentioning Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman as the three American writers who have succeeded best in maintaining their independence of European influence, Schölermann continues: "Whit-

¹³ *Nord und Süd* for February, 1903 (Bd. 104.-Heft 311). p. 204.

¹⁴ In the *Vossische Zeitung* for 1904. No. 15.

¹⁵ *Walt Whitman, Prosaschriften, In Auswahl übersetzt*. München und Leipzig: R. Piper & Co. 1905. p. xxvi. This author's views have been very materially modified since then. Compare his 'Whitman and his German Critics' (*Journ. of Eng. and Germ. Philol.* Vol. ix. No. 1), where he says: "I myself confess to a guilt of a serious attack of Whitmania, although I tried to be moderate in my statements and made Whitman *only* a superman instead of a God as my predecessors had done. . . . Nations that have produced a Goethe and an Emerson needs not and should not worship a Whitman as one of their heroes."

¹⁶ *Grashalme von Walt Whitman. In Auswahl übertragen*. Leipzig. 1907. p. 9.

¹⁷ *Walt Whitman. Grashalme. In Auswahl übertragen*. Leipzig. 1904. p. iv.

man belongs to a class of individuals who are more than life size, who spring into existence in a moment of lavish exuberance on the part of procreative nature. . . . Beethoven and Bismarck are men of similar calibre; Whitman also betrays a number of traits in common with that awe-inspiring man-of-men (*Ganzmenschen*) Jesus of Nazareth, for example, his exalted, tender kindness, his heroic love. . . . The healing power of this kindness and goodness, that ancient miracle-performing gift which causes the blind to see and the lame to walk, that gift Whitman also possessed."

To draw any clear lines of distinction between the different points of view from which the German enthusiasts have given their estimates of Whitman is, to say the least, an extremely difficult task. None of his admirers, so far as can be ascertained, have attempted a comprehensive study of his works after an organized method or plan,—to say nothing of a critical analysis. Practically all of them have been content to give loosely connected accounts of individual impressions received from a cursory reading of certain parts of his works, and these accounts are for the most part written in the spirit of a propaganda, eager at all times to seize upon the first opportunity for praise and equally eager to shield all weaknesses and shortcomings. And yet there are certain elements or features in Whitman's poetry which his German friends have pointed out with sufficient emphasis and uniformity to give us a fairly good notion of what they regard as characteristic and as having the greatest fascination for the reader. They have believed, for example, to find in our poet peculiar originality of language and style which produces a mysterious, spell-binding effect; furthermore, a new religious and philosophical doctrine of optimism and universality; and lastly, a new gospel of democracy or Americanism.

As regards language and style, the Whitmanites have, of course, been forced to recognize certain glaring imperfections, but these imperfections they have readily disposed of by making them appear as of little or no consequence in comparison with the many elements of beauty and power to be found in Whitman's lines. Federn calls his poems "simple and crude like the songs of the Psalms or of the Edda" and likens them to the

oldest cyclopean walls of Grecian masonry, "but these unwieldy metres," he says, "proclaim ideas which are the last fruit, the maturest product of the nineteenth century." Hans Benzmann readily admits that in view of its lack of poetic form, or rather, lack of harmony, to say nothing of its vagueness, confusedness, and abundance of prosaic passages, it would be fundamentally wrong to speak of Whitman's work as of the highest type of poetic art. "But on the other hand," says Benzmann, "it may be remarked that in certain respects this art has a rhythmic force which carries us irresistibly along with it and affects us with an extremely suggestive, impressionistic charm, partly on account of the peculiar meaning given to individual words from the connection in which they are used."

Julius Rodenberg characterizes Whitman's style in the following rhetorical language: "His style appears at first to contradict everything that we have been accustomed to heretofore—neither verse-form nor strophe, no rhyme, no meter, but rather, a billowy, rhythmically undulating ocean of thoughts and feelings, whose elemental vehemence is unrestrained by form, a surging mass of pictures, crushing and overthrowing one another, as if organic life were now for the first time issuing forth from chaos. Whitman's poetry reminds us of the cataracts of his native land, of the deafening roar of Niagara, which becomes melodious only after our senses have become accustomed to it, the eternal, primeval melody without beginning and end."

Johannes Schlaf, who has perhaps done more for the cause of Whitman than any one else in Germany, is completely carried away with his language: "What language! . . . It has the vigor and energy of the old Hebrew Psalmists and prophets. . . This language is as human as any, at times simply enumerating things as they are with almost American prosiness; and yet, it is filled with a fascinating pathos which differs from that of every other poet: an interminable rhythm, a ceaseless melody. It is like the storm with its rhythm, rising, subsiding, and rising anew; like the rhythm of ocean waves, like the atmosphere quivering in the hot sunlight, like the singing of birds, like the ceaseless agitation of nature itself. The vigor and warmth of healthy blood pulsating freely and briskly through

the body; an unheard of energy and profound genuineness of feeling which penetrates into all the phenomena of life and abandons itself with glowing fervor to the agitation accompanying its own genesis and change; like atoms quivering and vibrating in perpetual motion; like the free and easy breathing of perfect lungs, the sparkling animation of healthy eyes, the robustness of unweakened muscles: all this gives to the songs of Whitman their vigor and their pathos and sets them free from everything that we are accustomed to include under the name of art or art's accessories."

Another of the German admirers¹⁸ of Whitman—and one who is likewise very much fascinated with his language and style—believes that he "cast aside the shackles of rhyme" purely from an effort to give direct and unhampered expression to the immensity of the contents of his verses. Richard M. Meyer¹⁹ seems to be of a similar opinion: "Detached sentences approaching the language of the Bible somewhat; most rigorous avoidance of conventional poetic adornment: as in the churches of the Reformed party, the content of the word alone is to be effective. No image-worship! No incense! Only the rumbling sound of the organ in a combination of rhythms."

From the very first, Rolleston had expressed the view that the real secret of Whitman's strength lay in this one fact of his rejection of conventional forms. "We find in him a wealth of poetic power," he says, "whose beauty impresses us the more profoundly and lastingly for the very reason that it is not made an end and aim in itself." And this leads us to the consideration of another feature which is very closely connected with the question of language and style, namely that of the effect produced on the reader. Here again we may let the German Whitmanites speak for themselves.

In general, their references to the poetic effect of the *Leaves of Grass* are in perfect keeping with their manner of characterizing Whitman's language and style. It is the suddenness or

¹⁸ S. Lublinski, *Die Bilanz der Moderne*. Berlin. 1904. p. 355 ff.

¹⁹ *Die Deutsche Litteratur des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Berlin. 1906. p. 861 ff. Cf. also his article on "Die Weltliteratur und die Gegenwart" in *Deutsche Rundschau* for 1900 (Bd. CIV.), p. 276 ff.

spontaneity of effect which they have found to be the most characteristic quality of his verses. Ernst Schur²⁰ says: "It is as though one were stepping suddenly from the open plains into a forest to gaze upon a primeval tree towering on high. A world-unit, striking entirely new tones, like the turbulent roar of a storm passing over the ocean. The boundless he understands how to put into words, into rhythms."

Theodor Heuss²¹ gives the following description of how he had been affected: "The first acquaintance with Whitman has a staggering effect. I still recall very distinctly the uncanny, suggestive, spell-binding impression which the first few lines of his left on me some years ago. It is like coming from a room bearing all the marks of refinement and traditional culture and stepping suddenly out into the strange, mad hurricane of a passion which is overthrowing all the old columns and idols. One feels that Whitman is revolutionary throughout. But later on, when we learn to know him better, we begin to comprehend the consistency, the inner laws and necessities of this desolating passion, and from it all emerges a man who is remarkable in the harmony of his personality, unique in the earnestness and consciousness of his work and of his goal. Whitman is shaping and proclaiming the new, American individual."

Karl Federn speaks of the impressiveness of Whitman's poetry as of hypnotic spell: "He possesses one secret, which is the profoundest secret of the real poet, namely that of calling forth in the reader his own mood. We are suddenly raised on high, wafted into the sphere of his own emotions, compelled to exult with him and to mourn with him. We read the dirge on the death of Lincoln, 'When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd,' and even before we have had time to realize what the poem is about we are forced by the sad music of the words, by their mournful rhythm, to feel the whole grief occasioned by the death of a beloved friend, just as if we were attending a requiem-mass."

²⁰ In *Das Magazin für Litteratur* for 1908 (LXX, 7, 8).

²¹ Cf. his two articles on Whitman in *Die Hilfe. Beiblatt* for 1906. Nos. 13 and 14.

From what has been said, one might be led to believe that it is through sheer force of words, through the rhythmic melody of his lines, that Whitman has thus completely captivated his German readers — hypnotized them, as it were. But this would certainly be a mistake, for, after all, it is the inner content of his verses, the poet's own "Weltanschauung," which has left on them the deepest as well as the most lasting impression.

"The *Leaves of Grass*," says Schölermann, "are the first poetic glorification of the present age in epic-lyrical form, the first real affirmation of life as it is, not as it might be or as it was at some time in the past." Achelis²⁹ expresses the same thought in somewhat stronger terms: "In the midst of neo-romantic effeminacy and sentimental coddling Whitman is a representative of the most healthy joy of living; not of the base, materialistic kind, to be sure, but of a genuine affirmation of life as we see it exemplified in glowing love for mankind. In his productions there is a rough but healthy breath which quickens in our hearts our faith in ourselves."

Schlaf combines the thought of the poet's optimism with that of his monism in the following panegyric characterization of him as the one great poetic representative, not only of his own country and of his own generation, but of all countries for ages to come: "Perhaps he is worth more to us than all that has come out here in Europe under the name of poetry since the middle of the century. For, while even our best-known poets prove to be afflicted with a malady of criticism, skepticism, morbid yearning, pessimism and æsthetic affectation, Whitman is thoroughly positive and affirmative, the first great sanguine apostle of the new monistic spirit, which is to be the procreative spirit of future humanism, teeming with new religion, new ethics, new art. Whoever has once become thoroughly familiar with his writings will concede that I am not saying too much when I class him with the great religious prophets of the past, and when I maintain that he stands forth pre-eminently as a dispenser of the blessings of life, the first poet-seer of a third gos-

²⁹ In *Das Litterarische Echo* for October 15, 1904. Cf. also his article on Whitman in *Die Gegenwart* for 1904. No. 17.

pel destined to set everything free within us and to evoke from us whatever the new spirit wishes to attain to of light and freedom, as well as of a new vigorous, joyous conception of life. . . . Who in the whole realm of our old European civilization could be considered his equal, you may call him Friedrich Nietzsche or whatever else you like?"

Regarding the prevailing spirit of universality in Whitman's poetry — a term which is here used synonymously with monism or cosmic identity — Lublinski says: "A combination of the metropolis, the machine, factory noise, politics, the immensity of prairie nature, the aboriginal wildness of barbaric instinct, on the one hand; on the other, a humanism charged with flashes of wonderful tenderness, presentiment and promises of the future. This world of the most variegated and dazzling contrasts was submerged in the pious and unspeakably profound monistic feeling of the poet's own soul, which, with mingled arrogance and humility, adored every single manifestation of nature, of inexhaustible life. . . . The whole modern world, prominently among other things, the modern metropolis and modern science, thundered and groaned and puffed and quivered in his strange verses." Benzmann makes a similar reference to the poet's philosophy of universality. "In the rhythms of this poet," he says, "the mighty feeling of vitality in the American people; their personal thirst for liberty; their individualism as well as their democratic sense of homogeneousness; the spirit of the metropolis; the vigor of the primeval forest; primitive Germanic mysticism; pantheism and Darwinism,—have found expression in a peculiar poetic form."

Benzmann, as we see, mentions Whitman's Americanism only as a part of his poetic doctrine of universality. Others have emphasized this side of his creed as lying at the very basis of all that he has produced, at any rate, as being the most characteristic feature of his work and as giving him the real right to be called the representative poet of America. We remember that Freiligrath spoke of him from the very first as "the only specifically American poet" that his country had produced up to that time (1868), referring to him as "a totally unique figure, who stands firmly and consciously upon his own American feet."

We recall also Lessing's comparison of Whiman's relation to American literature with that of Dante to the Italian, Shakespeare to the English and Goethe to the German. Similar comparisons have been made between our poet and some of the brightest lights in the literature of his own country, for example, Longfellow, Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Bret Harte, and Mark Twain, but with this difference,—that in each of the latter instances it is Whitman who stands forth pre-eminently as *the* poet of America. According to his German friends, he is not only the first American poet who has fully succeeded in maintaining his independence of European influence; he is also the only one who has given to the world a correct picture of the almost boundless expanse of his country, of the impressive grandeur of its mountains, woods, rivers, and lakes; and above all, a true and vivid account of the industrial, political, and intellectual strivings of its people.

"His poetry," says Rodenberg, "is built up on colossal dimensions. . . . One gains from it a picture of the immensity of his country such as we have scarcely ever had before: in these unconnected sentences, these broken chords, these interjections and parentheses, the magnificence of his country moves along, one might say, in the form of a giant. . . . The countless manifestations of American life flit by as if chased by a whirlwind."

One of the German enthusiasts has referred to Whitman's importance to social and political America by calling him "the apostle of a proud independence in all walks of life and the harbinger-elect of American popular government." Another cautions us not to use the word democracy in connection with Whitman's poetry, except, in the higher, ethical sense. "To him," he says, "poetry is no æsthetic game of certain privileged classes or individuals; on the contrary, it is the unfolding of the purely human element in all the manifestations and situations of life. . . . And yet, however much he emphasized the equality of men, however much he hated the idea of giving separate rights to privileged classes, just as heartily did he, on the other hand, voice the importance of personal individuality, and in this respect he should be classed with Emerson as an equally pro-

nounced individualist." Schlaf even goes so far as to say that the "*Leaves of Grass* should be regarded, above everything else, as the first awakening of Teutonic America, the first great original, intellectual product of the country, and the purest expression of a spirit of civilization and culture in the act of asserting its right to a place in American national life."

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